

Down The Rabbit Hole by pendragonfics

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Summary:

You're a teacher at Hawkins Middle, who's accidental right-place-at-the-wrong-time leads you to be a part of the secret goings-on in Hawkins. Jim Hopper is just a cop, trying to do right by the law, who happens to adopt a psionic pre-teen who's in your history class.

Down The Rabbit Hole

Author's Note:

Consider this: Jim Hopper read *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* to Sarah as a little girl, and he reads from the same copy of the book to El. Okay, that's my head cannon, but also, consider this: *you're* Alice in this scenario...falling down the rabbit hole.

That was the prompt I made myself for this request from a pal on Tumblr. Hope they like it!

A school teacher's wage was decent. It had you living in a nice, small house paying rent by the week, living modestly in the small town of Hawkins. You wanted a dog, but didn't have the yard, or fence for it. You taught history, but inside, wished you could teach English. But your mother, and your mother's mother were teachers, and all the _____ family name had been teachers since women could be teachers, and there was no greater subject in your lineage than history. It wasn't that history was terrible, but perhaps, that the greatest things to ever happen had already happened, and life in 1982 would never live up to the epics.

But that was true until you all but fell into the rabbit hole, or rather, the conspiracy of danger that lurked after dark in Hawkins. It had been a Friday night, and unlike those who unwound from the weekly stress by watching *Charlies Angels*, you took yourself on long walks around the lake, taking time to remove your mind from unruly students and unmarked tests to be completed before Monday.

But it was here you found something truly and utterly horrible. The body of one of your students, the young Will Byers, the body blue and bloated upon the water's edge. You wasted no time calling 911, and when State Trooper O'Bannen came to the scene, you were frightened out of your wits. You wished you could take a week from work to process the horrible thing you found, but it wasn't an option. The kids at Hawkins Middle School needed to keep the daily routine, despite the death of a fellow student.

Apart from Mrs. Byers, the only person who stopped long enough to care about what you saw was the Hawkins Chief of police, Jim Hopper. But then again, he was chasing a case too, because not too long after that, another student went missing, from a grade you didn't teach. Barbara Holland. And then there as something about a little girl, with a shaved head –

You kept your head down, and taught history to the classes you had. No matter how strange the world seemed now, there was one consistent thing that kept your kids writing their essays on time, and that was the fall of Rome.

You even planned to have an in-class event where you would bring in old sheets and had them dress up like senators. Minus the stabbing, of course. But you didn't, in the end. Instead you put on a VCR of *Julius Caesar* and fast-forwarded past the murderous parts.

But as much as going back to everyday life went, it just couldn't. Perhaps it was because every so often, you'd have a knock on your classroom door, a visitor on your home's doorstep. The one and only Chief Hopper. And further down the rabbit hole you fell – unrequitedly in love with the police chief.

“Do you have ten minutes?” he'd ask, eyes pleading. “I need to hear your statement again for the Byers case.”

You'd agree. Ten minutes would turn to an hour. Talk would stay mostly on topic, until he'd notice your empty ring finger, and you'd notice the tan line on his, empty. Then he'd get radioed in by the station, and off he'd go.

“I need you to come with me, on this,” he'd say, leaning against your front door like the lead man in an early Hollywood movie, all dramatic and gorgeous, “I have to check out a lead, but I need someone.”

“Why don't you ask one of your officers at the station?” You ask, your hands full of dough from your biweekly bread making, the dough falling off as you talked. “I'm just...me.”

He shook his head. “It's more than needing back up. I need someone,

who can, uh, talk to civilians...who isn't a part of all of it." He looks to your hands, and the carpet where the dough is *plopping* onto it. "Sorry if it isn't a good time –,"

You shake your head. "It's a sourdough, so it needs plenty of time to rise by itself. Give me fifteen minutes and I'll be ready to help out."

When you're all cleaned up, you notice all the dough has been picked up from the carpet. You don't say anything, and instead lock the house up, and don't think twice about getting into his car, and roaring away to nearly out of town.

Down the rabbit hole? Perhaps you were always there. Life seemed to be upside down, back to front, and shaken up for good measure. You fell further behind in your marking for the classes you taught, further away from the required norms required for single, young school teachers spending time around reputable, divorced police chiefs.

If anyone gossiped, you did not hear it.

In the end, Will Byers was fine, alive – back from the dead, as the newspaper reported it. The world went on spinning. The child Jim had been looking for had disappeared, and you were still pining for the man who seemed to not care less for anything in the world that wasn't coffee or a cigarette. He went back to his life, solving petty feuds between farmers and teenagers, and you went back to telling Heather Gutmann that she couldn't sleep in class.

Life went on. It was good.

But that was until you had a new student enter your class. It was a new year, after all, and new students came and went like the ebb and the flow of the tides. Last year, you had the young Maxine Mayfield enter your class, and now, the grade where the friends of her had gone to, there was another new face. She had curly hair pulled back with colourful clips, and looked at the class of ninth graders like they had extra teeth in their mouth.

Behind her, was Principle Coleman, and Chief Jim Hopper, of the Hawkins Police Department. She looks to you with wide eyes, silent. "Hello everyone! We have a new student to welcome to the class,"

Principle Coleman tells the all-but rowdy class, “This is Jane Hopper, make her fe–,”

“I go by Elle,” she says, voice small, but big enough to interrupt Principle Coleman.

You smile, and approaching your new student, you point out a spare desk behind Dustin Henderson, beside Mike Wheeler. “Go on and take a seat, Elle. I’m sure we’re all going to enjoy having a new face to our cohort. Now, can you all turn to page three of your textbooks and start reading about ancient Egypt while I talk to Chief Hopper and Mr. Coleman...”

You steer the men from the classroom, and closing the door behind you, you turn to them. But Principle Coleman speaks first. “Jane has a sort of...learning problem. I hope you understand what this means as her teacher. She will need extra attention to become up to speed with the other children.” He goes to add something, but upon hearing another teacher paging him from up the hall, excuses himself, and goes to fix the uprising in room 3B.

You look to the Chief. “In what ways does Jane need extra attention?” you ask him, curious. “You know, as her teacher.”

He clears his throat, a blush staining those cheeks under the stubble. “She’s just never been to school before. I taught her the time, and how to read chapter books.”

“I see,” you hum, and glance through the glass panel in the door to see the class. Like you instructed, they’re reading from the text, some highlighting the lines, some taking notes, some doodling in the margins. “Are you free this afternoon for coffee?”

Jim’s cheeks darken again, but he coughs into his fist, diffusing the pigment. “Uh, yeah. I’ll organise Elle to go after school with the Wheelers.”

You smile. “Fantastic.”

But instead of taking you to a diner, you decided to make the coffee yourself, in the staff room. Perhaps it was because of your tight

money belt, considering that all the things that had happened in Hawkins in the last two years had been troubling to you. Perhaps it was because you wanted to make sure this encounter was as strictly professional as it could. This was not a police investigation where Jim Hopper had you running around Hawkins like *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*. This was a teacher, talking to a parent, about their student/child. Professional.

But when Jim entered the staff room, still in his police uniform, hat off, hair tousled, why did it feel anything but? It was just a crush. Damn the rabbit hole. It was just an illusion.

He accepts your coffee, smiling into the cup at how you didn't add cream or sugar. You both sit at the long table, notepaper, and pen before you, a bowl of nearly-rotting fruit further along. A beat passes between the pair of you, and then, clearing your throat, you begin the parent-teacher talk. "Elle – Jane," you correct yourself, "She's the child you were searching for last year, isn't she?" Your voice is low, even though you're alone, most of the teacher's gone home for the night, and cleaners too. "Hopper?"

He nods. "I found her." He smiles, "She's been through hell, and she's a hell of a kid," he tells you. "Uh, what was she like in class today?"

You smile. "We're still on the last topic, but from what I can see, she's interacting well, taking notes along with the other students. Needs to work on raising her hand to talk, and getting a hall pass for the bathroom..." you pass a page of your notes him, and see him nodding along, and add, "I'm excited to see what Elle can achieve this year."

Jim smiles, but it's small, sad. "Not many people have been so positive about her," he says. "I talked with Christopherson, and he wasn't so thrilled with her. All but said she was a freak." Jim's eyebrows rise, and wiping a hand over his face, he adds, "She's just a kid."

You nod. "An amazing little girl who has done more for this town than anyone will ever know," you tell him softly. "I know about what all of it was about," you confide, "I put all the pieces together, it wasn't the Russians," you laugh softly, "It was monsters."

He drinks the rest of his coffee like a bitter shot, agreeing.

“Elle is going to be fine,” you tell him, “She’s strong. She’s mastered the Demogorgon, and the Mind Flayer. She can defeat Middle School, no problems.” You move your hand across the table to take the notes back, but without noticing, your hands brush, the touch almost electric. A blush mottles your face, and taking your hand away, you go to apologise.

Jim shakes his head. “Don’t,” he says softly, “It’s okay.”

You know this is a parent-teacher talk. You know this is a professional, casual setting. But you’ve got to ask it. It’s been on your mind ever since Jim took you for questioning the third time after you gave your official statement.

“Why me?” you ask, voice low, soft. “You kept coming to me, again and *again*,” you say. “I know I’m your daughter’s teacher and this is out of line just thinking of it –,”

You don’t finish your sentence. Because he leans across the table, and silences your qualms with a soft kiss, his hand cradling the side of your face, and for a second, it’s all good. The worries and the horrors and the panic and the terrible, terrible shit that you and everyone else has gone through is liquefied, dripping away until it’s nothing compared to what is happening, until there is no world, no Hawkins, just Jim, Jim and his stubble, Jim and his soft lips and the smell of coffee, cigarettes and a faint whiff of whiskey or cologne. You melt into his kiss, and by the time that you realise it’s happening, it isn’t, and you’re just two adults sitting at a table once again.

“Jim,” you whisper, “I – I thought I was going mad, I didn’t –,”

A history teacher who lived in a time that was greater than in the books? Maybe it wasn’t that history was terrible, but perhaps, that the greatest things to ever happen had already happened – to you, and to all the people around you in Hawkins. If poor young Alice fell into Wonderland by accident, and saw all the beautiful horrors of the fantasy world, it didn’t mean it wasn’t real, or that it wasn’t for those who hasn’t touched the abstract world of the Upside Down. It just was a secret world, a fantasy that proved that only the select few

could see it. You. The children you taught, Jim Hopper. Little Elle.

Maybe life in 1984 would never live up to the epics. For everyone else.

Jim grins, his eyes meeting yours, “Didn’t you know? In Hawkins, we’re all mad here.”

Author's Note:

You can find me on Tumblr on as @chaotic--lovely,
and if you want to request a fic, check out
[@pendragonfics](#)! ʘ.ʘ.ʘ❀